

NOTES ON THE CUBAN CRISIS
as of Sunday, October 28, 1962

The following are extracts from a longer memorandum based exclusively on public sources. Some other parts will be sent on later.

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WHAT HAVE WE TO TRADE IN NEGOTIATIONS PRECIPITATED BY A KHRUSHCHEV FORWARD MOVE?

Khrushchev made a forward move. How do we get him to back down?

Firmness, we say. Good.

Use force, if necessary. Fine.

But when we sit down at the table, one sometimes hears, we have to be able to offer him something. There has to be a trade. This is one of the reasons, for example, that the Cuban-Turkish swap was seriously considered by some.

Where Khrushchev has made an aggressive move it is vital to bear in mind that we have other things to trade than assets or allies we have accumulated over the years. In brief, we are trading for (a) the Russians stepping back (the removal of their bases) (b) our forbearance from pushing him back (from destroying or removing them ourselves).

The point has a general significance for all situations in which the Communists attempt to upset the balance. If everytime Khrushchev moves forward, we get him to return only by offering something we have had for many years, a profitable future strategy for him is all too clear.

THE NEGATIVE VALUE OF SURRENDERING EVEN VALUELESS ASSETS UNDER PRESSURE

It is important that in appearance as well as in reality we do not yield to a Russian threat. As it happens one of the writers of this note has written a series of critical analyses of the IRBM's beginning in 1957 - before, during and after the installation of Thors and Jupiters overseas. We believe the Thor and Jupiter installations were a poor move on our part. Nonetheless the removal of the Jupiters under pressure would be a very different thing from the dismantling of the Thors in England, initiated some time ago by the English, because they are not worth their keep. Both Khrushchev's moves and our countermoves in the Cuban crisis have world-wide effects on the expectations of allied, nuclear and satellite countries, to say nothing of domestic elements on both sides.

On the other hand the deficiencies of the Thor and Jupiter bases should not be taken as an example of a general worthlessness or even of the lessening value of overseas bases. As we shall discuss, the contrary is true. Despite many loose statements from both the left and the right in recent times, from our own doves and hawks, the overseas bases are likely to increase in importance in this decade.

NUCLEAR RISKS

Both Kennedy and Khrushchev have repeatedly stressed the risks of nuclear war in this crisis. In fact the main risks were of a local non-nuclear action, involving U. S. and Russian forces. This island, surrounded by water, did not represent nor was it contiguous to interests vital to Khrushchev. He was not likely to throw missiles at the U. S. because of a loss here. The possibilities of isolating a limited conflict have seldom been clearer. Remote islands are better than enclaves in satellite territory in this respect. On the other hand, Khrushchev clearly would have lost the non-nuclear exchange. It is this loss that he backed down from.

When we stress that the world is on "the abyss of destruction" as on October 22 or that events are near the point of moving out of control as on October 28,* we scare our allies and neutrals and our own constituents more - and if Khrushchev believes we believe this, we scare Khrushchev less. He'll think it unlikely we'll let matters get unmanageable. Particularly in a situation where our adversary has made a move which we can counter with precise and very limited non-nuclear means, it is absurd for us to stress that we believe the application of such means might be tantamount to world destruction. And in Cuba we can push him out with conventional force.

There are circumstances in which we may want to stress the probabilities of nuclear escalation. But these are clearly not the ones. For example, in Berlin and Central Europe we want to make clear that, if he moved on Berlin, we would get enough conventional forces involved so that if he then destroyed them, the risks of our nuclear response would be raised enormously. The circumstances in Cuba are completely different.

Even in the Central European case our course of action is quite different from that of a dictator who use a reputation for irresponsibility and a willingness to usher in Goetterdaemmerung for even minor gains. The threat of uncontrollability should be administered by prescription against special dangers and in small doses. Its use except in extremis is not compatible with a reputation for sanity.

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* "... developments were approaching a point where events could have become unmanageable." October 28, Kennedy. "... as we step back from danger" October 28, Kennedy.

Khrushchev interestingly enough has played both sides of the controllability wager. When confronted with a threat of having a freighter boarded and searched, he said this would make "talks useless" and bring into action the "forces and laws...of war." It would have "irretrievably fatal consequences." (October 28) On the other hand he was very careful to stress that Russian officers were in complete control of the Cuban missiles and that there was no chance of accidental war from this source. "Any possibility of accidental usage of those means, which might cause harm to the United States, is excluded." (October 27) He also stressed that "the Soviet Government will not allow itself to be provoked." (October 28)

On the other hand our own statements have not stressed that we are in control.

If Khrushchev salvages anything from this crisis, and his current defeat, it has been plain for days that it would be in the form of an imputation that the Americans have been reckless and that he is the dove of peace. Without doubt there are limits to the loss of face we want to impose on Khrushchev. But there are even sharper limits on the amount of face we want him to save, and on any loss that he might impose on us.

Our goal should be to make it plain, without rubbing it in, that Khrushchev stepped down to avoid a clash of conventional forces in which he would have lost, and that to avoid this loss he would have had to undertake irresponsible, perhaps nuclear, risks. We were and are in control of our nuclear forces, and we hope and believe that Khrushchev is in charge of his.

CONTROLLED NUCLEAR WAR, BUT NO CONTROL IN BOARDING AND SEARCHING A SHIP?

Before the Cuban crisis the President, Secretary McNamara, and Secretary Rusk have declared, and their subordinates have been elaborating, a thoughtful doctrine of controlled response, up to and including the conduct of a nuclear war. Do we really want now to suggest that we cannot control our responses, even in boarding a Russian freighter?

Mr. Kennedy's October 22 statement, excellent as it was as a whole, had in it some latent flaws which could widen under stress. It focussed on the notion that the world is on the "abyss of destruction." In attempting to get across the essential message of the American nuclear guarantee for our neighbors, it suggested that we would respond to "any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere" with "a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union." Which doesn't sound like a controlled response. All that is necessary to say is that we would respond to a missile against one of our neighbors as we would

respond to one against ourselves. This leaves open the possibility of controlled reaction. It is even more important, however, to make clear that we do not exclude the possibility of control in the non-nuclear spectrum: we are responding here to aggression which has not involved the firing of a nuclear weapon. The Cuban crisis demonstrates the relevance and, it seems, the adequacy of a non-nuclear move (the threat or the actual use of bombing with high explosives, or paratroops, or the like) against an enemy move to install nuclear weapons. Installing nuclear weapons is, of course, quite another thing from firing them. It is interesting that a controlled non-nuclear move worked against the act of installation.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF OVERSEAS BASES IN THE 1960's

In arms control negotiations precipitated by the crisis it is very probable that overseas bases will come up for discussion. Detente, disengagement, etc., are natural psychological followers of a crisis in which an actual military engagement was threatened. One of the main goals of Soviet policy since the war has been the dismantling of the bases encircling them. Moreover, there is a good deal of confusion on our own side about the military and political role of overseas bases in the strategic situation of the 1960's. Some of the hawks as well as the doves on our own side tend to meet on common ground in their depreciation of overseas bases. Suggestions that modern developments in missilery make it unnecessary for us to have bases overseas might be quoted from surviving massive retaliationists, but also from The Liberal Papers.

Such suggestions are a vast oversimplification of the military implications of current and future states of the art of war. It is true that the deterrent function of some of our weapons in a big thermonuclear war was much more dependent on overseas bases when the predominant part of our force was the short-legged B-47. However, thermonuclear war is not the only problem of national defense. Our defense programs have stressed more and more the threat of non-nuclear, conventional and unconventional warfare - moreover, thermonuclear war itself is a lot more complicated than this depreciation of overseas bases suggests.

In brief, overseas bases have vital roles in the central war in the 1960's - both for deterrence and for limiting damage in case deterrence fails. They do dilute and can dilute even more his offensive preparations by posing the need to set up a variety of defensive barriers. They are an important source of continuing information on the enemy. They can be made to complicate the design of his attack - for example, with the extension of the bomb alarm system. Under several plausible contingencies of outbreak they can help spoil his attack.

All this for a thermonuclear war.

But even more obvious today, overseas bases have a dominant role in non-nuclear wars. They affect the speed with which we can react and the cost and size of our reaction to aggressions in remote parts of the world. (The role of Japan in fighting the Korean war, the recent movements from various overseas stations to Thailand, and to take an example from today's headlines, the movement of weapons from Thailand in support of the Indians in their battle with the Chinese.) They very engagement of U. S. forces in many parts of the world is an important hostage to allies and neutral powers and a demonstration of the credibility and likelihood of our response to Communist aggression.

It is startling that in spite of the explicit shift of government policy in the last two years to stress conventional and unconventional non-nuclear wars, the importance of overseas bases seems to be less and less understood.

Moves to disengage overseas might be encouraged by two sorts of statement that we have made recently. (a) Statements stressing (and over-stressing) nuclear risks in the current crisis have been Russian as well as U. S., and (b) our recent stress on the offense-defense distinction which Khrushchev carefully attributes to us. If "offensive" weapons are the problem, and if in fact we have been on the brink of nuclear war and almost out of control of developments, maybe we had better disengage our own offensive weapons overseas. Or more likely maybe we had better phrase the issues more carefully.

"OFFENSE-DEFENSE" SEMANTICS

The distinction made by the President between offensive and defensive weapons has served a purpose: it marked a limit, somewhat arbitrarily placed and hazy, but clear enough in the immediate circumstances, to indicate Russian strategic trespass. However, it would be a mistake to rely for delineating our interests in the immediate future on drawing lines with so broad a brush.

Not only Khrushchev himself, but the unilateral disarmers and many neutralists have used the distinction to point out that if our protest is simply against placing missiles and bombers within reach of the United States, the Russians have parallel grievances against us. Illusions of detente and disengagement flourish in this haze.

In fact there is no precise distinction between offensive and defensive weapons. An aggressor can limit damage to himself, among other subtler ways, by using surface-to-surface missiles or bombers to reduce our retaliatory forces before they take off, and after the launching of our retaliatory forces he can use active and passive defenses to reduce our retaliation further. Moreover, as Castro's surface-to-air missiles and fighters illustrate,

active defenses can be used to prevent or make difficult surveillance and so help to cover the build up of a force of surface-to-surface missiles and manned bombers.

While the distinction between first and second strike capabilities is an important one, it's rather subtler than its recent bowdlerized popular form. It is first of all a question of the performance of the system as a whole, rather than a characteristic of individual vehicles. Moreover, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to have a pure second strike capability, though it is somewhat easier to get a capability which has only a first strike utility against a strong, intelligent opponent. Nonetheless even here the problem would have to be judged in terms of the system for retaliation as a whole, rather than one part of it located in a single spot. All of this, while sketched only roughly, is a somewhat more refined set of distinctions than is likely to be immediately intelligible in international discussions in the next period.

There are some immediate pragmatic considerations in connection with such distinctions. (1) As we have formulated the issues so far, the confusion is likely to generate or assist in generating a lot of vaguely wishful talks about symmetry and justice in the disarmament field. (2) Khrushchev can be counted on to exploit the anomalies for all they are worth in his campaign to make his actions in Cuba seem a contribution to world disarmament. (3) It is not in the interests of the United States to make the limitation on the Cuban build up solely in terms of the piling up of surface-to-surface missiles and bombers: there are limits we should set to a build up of active defenses beyond which, we should make clear, their implications are taken by us to be "offensive."

Khrushchev has been elaborately finical in handling the offense-defense distinction. He repeats again and again "the weapons you refer to as offensive." Perhaps we should accept the gambit, raise the discussion to the next higher level, and make clear that indeed it is not just bombers and surface-to-surface missiles that concern us. Manned fighters, etc., which would permit the covert build up of offense, or the greatly inflated ground forces the Cubans label defensive, which might be used in offensive fashion in the Western Hemisphere trouble us too.

KEEPING OPEN POSSIBLE AID TO CUBAN RESISTANCE

The President has undertaken firm assurances against invading Cuba as well as removing the quarantine in return for the removal of weapons and a halt on any future buildup. How much will this limit our action now and in the future? Is there an expiration date on this assurance about invasion from outside Cuba? More important, how does it restrict us from aiding internal resistance?

Khrushchev in his message of October 27 asked us to "declare that the United States of America would respect the inviolability of Cuban borders,

its sovereignty," and "take the pledge not to interfere in internal affairs, not to intrude themselves, and not permit their territory to be used as a bridgehead for the invasion of Cuba and restrain those who plan to carry an aggression against Cuba, either from U. S. territory or from the territory of other territories neighboring to Cuba." Mr. Kennedy's response spoke more sparsely of assurances by the United States not to invade and expressed the belief that similar assurances by other governments in the Hemisphere would be forthcoming. This does not explicitly rule out action by exiles and it does not explicitly exclude support of an internal resistance. It is important for the President to keep this assurance so limited.

The President has made clear on many occasions since the attempted invasion in April, 1961, that we do not intend to abandon the Cubans to Castro and the Communists. His speech on October 22 was carefully phrased to indicate that we were interested not in preserving in peace the Castro government but in giving the Cuban people an opportunity for independence and free choice - something different from and probably incompatible with saving the present government. Have these commitments been qualified by the subsequent statements offering assurance against invasion? We think it is extremely important that future statements of guarantees against invasion be so formulated as to leave us free to help internal resistance. And we expect internal resistance will grow.

Assume that events proceed on their present course, that in fact Khrushchev verifiably removes the offensive weapons as the result of U. S. pressures. (Or assume we destroy the bases ourselves, with proper political warning to the Cuban people.) We believe this development will intensify the already large strains on the Castro regime and make much more likely a crack. It is above all extremely important that we plan for this contingency. And that we not limit our considerations simply to the narrow more technical problems involved in coups or a military occupation with a semblance of native dress. So far as anticipating unrest, resistance or rebellion in the Communist countries, the West has had a depressingly bad record, starting from the European satellite rebellions in the summer of 1953 through the recent Chinese exodus. We seem perpetually surprised and, worse, embarrassed by them. We should be able to do something more than help our opponents put down a rebellion; or stop an exodus; or stand passively by while they do it themselves.

The current or recent estimates that resistance in Cuba, though widespread, is passive rather than active, are off the point. The events of this crisis are sure to have a large effect inside Cuba in the next months and we would conjecture that the effect will favor the possibility of overthrowing Castro, with our aid, or alternatively will offer a significant chance that there will be an unsuccessful attempt without our aid. This last could hurt us badly.

First, the recent events will shake Castro's hold. Khrushchev is agile, rational, able to stand a considerable comedown. He is clever enough at maneuver to make it possible for him to salvage quite a bit from the crisis, especially if we play our cards badly.

For Castro the objective situation is more serious, and subjectively more serious too: a comedown is much harder for him to take. His regime is in serious economic difficulties, and he has been under severe strain in his inner party struggles. To compensate partially for these frustrations he has had the grandeur of increasing military power, intimate association with one of the greats, and successful defiance of the other. Now he is losing these. In the whole week of crisis he was not an actor in the drama, nor even a very audible chorus. President Kennedy talked to Premier Khrushchev, and Khrushchev to Kennedy. Even U Thant and Bertrand Russell seemed in closer communication with one or both of the principals.

Castro's character is quite different from Khrushchev's, and very far from the Bolshevik model of discipline and emotional control as analysed by Nathan Leites. There are large ingredients of irrationality, impulsiveness, impatience, guilt and pride. He is much less able to stand public humiliation. For Khrushchev it was an important sideshow, for Castro it was the main event. Castro cannot back away or easily find alternatives. He has no canal to seize, like Nasser. Unlike Khrushchev, he doesn't have other parts of the world to turn to. (His adventures in South America at any rate don't look immediately promising enough to compensate.)

He is not likely to be good at accepting decisions imposed from without for dismantling, removal or inspection, but will rather reassert himself by complicating the arrangements. "We shall see," he has just announced, "who has the right to shout." But it is doubtful that any concessions we or Khrushchev might make would be enough to satisfy him or his feeling that the sovereign independence of Cuba has been violated. He cannot help but notice that he and Cuba are being used as pawns in the game, not just by Kennedy, but also by Khrushchev. Khrushchev's offer to trade Cuban for Turkish missile removal could not have sat well with Castro. Furthermore the abrupt notice of withdrawal, evidently without a publicly acknowledged personal message to Castro, is not likely to have been softened much by Khrushchev's request for an American promise not to invade. Nor by Mr. Kennedy's response. "Mr. President," says Premier Khrushchev, "I trust your statement." For Fidel, however, "the guarantees of which President Kennedy speaks against the invasion of Cuba will not exist" without the elimination also of all commercial and economic pressures, all subversive activities, pirate attacks, violation of air and naval space and without withdrawal from Guantanamo. As Raul has put it, now that the Americans have promised not to invade, Cuba will be twice as alert. Which suggests they don't regard the promise as worth anything like what it is exchanged for.

It is likely that Khrushchev and Castro have had troubles before this. Castro does not just take orders and Khrushchev has made remarks to visitors about Castro's unpredictability. Castro's probable feelings of being used, abused, betrayed will not help future relations between

them. His history of defiance of big powers, first Batista, then the U. S., suggests that the big powers may now include Khrushchev, and lead him back to the "Frente a Todos" stand which he adopted in 1955.

However, we must not forget another aspect of Castro's character. He delights in tricking or outwitting an enemy. (See, for example, his evident delight in deceiving the American press in the Sierra Maestra, his personal participation in flushing out resistance groups, in uncovering the Dominican plot, etc.) Under these circumstances he can tolerate waiting to spring the trap. Against the Northern colossus Castro would not hesitate to cooperate in a program of deception with the Russians for a camouflaged military buildup.

Khrushchev could of course attempt to restore his previous relations with Cuba by (a) a massive program of economic aid, or (b) a large military program of a purely "defensive" type, or (c) an attempt to build up an offensive capability, not simply by surprise and speed with only the preparatory steps concealed, as in the past few months, but this time more slowly and entirely under cover. However, what may make any of these moves less likely is precisely the difficulties and unpredictabilities of the Cubans and the fact that Khrushchev has already been burned. Even if he does essay a vast economic program, it will take a very considerable length of time to overcome the spreading economic deterioration in Cuba. Of the economic aid that Khrushchev has so far supplied, a good deal was wasted by Cuban incompetence and some of it was fictitious. (Reports from refugees suggest that Russian promises for factories have not been fulfilled.) And if Castro is a great problem to Khrushchev, instead of winning him with carrots, Khrushchev may have to try the opposite - of starving him out to bring him to heel. Whichever happens, however, it seems unlikely that in the next year economic conditions are likely to improve sharply. And they may get worse.

The large scale entry of the Russians onto the scene and now their possible withdrawal are likely to have had great political effects on the Cubans. They must sometimes be puzzled as to who is in charge. Castro's relations with the Communist apparatus have oscillated. There was a period culminating in the winter of 1961, which was marked by Castro's sloughing off of Fidelismo and by his ardent espousal of Marxism-Leninism. This was followed in March by a denunciation of the Communist official Escalante and of the sectarianism of the Cuban Communist apparatus. Then the increasing Soviet presence in the summer and fall. And now a possible Soviet withdrawal. Power relations have been shaken several times.

The political and economic uncertainties are likely to grow in the next months, and with them, opportunities for resistance. It is by no means inconceivable that there will be splits in the leadership as well as a growth of active popular resistance. Suppose there should be fighting and widespread guerrilla action, establishing a substantial foothold - perhaps controlling a province. Should we be passive in such an event?

It seems clear that we should prepare now for such eventualities. The formal assurances against invasion given by the President so far do not exclude help to Cubans. However, they should clarify current government policy. They should make that policy more clearly depend, if Castro is to be overthrown, on the Cubans themselves and on our assistance to them. Much of the discussion today fluctuates between the extremes of an invasion regarded as a technical military problem and the tendency to regard any use of force as self-defeating, leading to our own Algeria, etc. The world of possible actions is a lot richer than these two alternatives, as the last week has suggested. We can expect accumulating domestic pressures in the next period for our taking some active role in displacing Communism in Cuba. It is important therefore to consider some of the effects of last week's events on a somewhat longer term than the next week.

In a future stretching onto months we suspect that some things can be done. Aside from future cracks in the regime, there is a future to be affected for the young - the 15 to 25 year olds who form the mass basis for Castro's support. It is important to address them. They are the ones who are likely to take to the hills. While we may be supporting several groups today, it is clear from the public evidence that our main emphasis has gone to the Cuban Revolutionary Council. It deserves some support, but it is unlikely to have any appeal to the young Cubans in or out of Cuba. The Council, on their view, stands essentially for a return to pre-Batista Cuba without economic or social change. In effect it has rested on the hope of an American invasion to accomplish a purely constitutional change and the political transfer of power. We need to broaden the basis of our support to include stronger emphasis on the groups who, while anti-Communist, are for economic and social change. And we should encourage the formation of concrete programs, political, economic, and social, for a post-Castro government. There are a number of things that could be done here, including for example, help for some of the young Cubans not identified with any specific political group, who are interested in putting out a periodical in which such programs might be debated and crystallized.

One of the paradoxes of our recent policy is that we seem to have given our principal emphasis to the Cubans who typify the groups we find are a principal obstacle to the Alliance for Progress program in the rest of Latin America. It would be an irony to help reinstate by force in Cuba the very ones who oppose the changes we consider essential.

In sum, in giving assurances against invasion,

(1) We should avoid offering any guarantees whatsoever against our helping Cuban resistance in and out of Cuba.

(2) More than that, we should reiterate that we strongly support independence and freedom for the Cubans.

(3) We should anticipate and plan to assist by appropriate means a possible growth of resistance in the next six months.

(4) In line with the at least temporary renunciation of U. S. invasion and the expectation of aid to internal resistance, we should broaden the base of our support among the Cubans.